

A CURTAIN LECTURE,

B E T W E E N

Mary Browne and her Husband John Browne, In BLYTHING HUNDRED.

MARY.

WELL John! as this is Sunday morning, I'll tell you a piece of my mind before we get up—I think it will be much better for you not to run after hearing Mr. Paine's book any more, and his new Doctrine of Equality as you call it; for you lose a day or two after them every week, besides the money you spend; and I am sure we want all you can earn this time of the year.

JOHN.

Why ha'n't I told you we shall soon be much better off? that we shall have no Lords, nor Squires, nor great men, but shall be all equal; that we shall have no taxes; that every thing will be much cheaper; that if I work at all, I shall be much better paid; that we shall all do as we like, that no body will have power to order us, because we shall have the same power to order them.

MARY.

I wonder John how you can be such a fool to believe such nonsense; how is it possible that people should be all equal? how can you be made a gentleman, or a great tradesman or farmer, when you have neither land nor money, and can neither write nor read? What, I suppose estates and farms are to be all divided, and every body have a part; but then I doubt we should not get our little hempland for our share, and if nobody work, how is the ground to be plowed and sown? And if not, how can things be cheaper? And if you don't work for others, others won't work for you; and if you would work, who could pay you for it, if nobody has money enough for that purpose? And how could we be clothed; for though I could make you shirts and slops, if we could get cloth, you could not make shoes and boots for yourself; and who would fetch us tea and sugar, for I have heard they come from over sea? As to taxes, I don't know much about them; but as silly as I am, I know people must always pay something to maintain the King and the Soldiers, and the Men of War and the Sailors; for if we can't beat the French and keep them away from us, they'd soon come and carve for themselves, and would make fine work indeed; why you fool! they hang folks without judge or jury, and stab and shoot the women and children; and they say a great many hundreds of their people have run away for fear of being murder'd, and are come here to be maintained, and they have sent their poor King to gaol, because he don't like their goings on, and their Equality as they call it.

JOHN.

Why, Mary, how your tongue runs!

MARY.

And well it may, if you will be such a fool; and I am resolved to argue it out with you this morning. Why man, when you came from the assizes with Tom Clod, (who carried you as a witness) you talked quite different; you then praised the Judge, and said what a fine man he was, and that he and the Jury gave Tom his cottage, tho' he stood against old Squire Gripe, and tho' his Counsel talked so much, and every body, before they went, said his money must carry the cause; but might did not overcome right then John.

JOHN.

Well, that's sure enough, for they did not mind the Squire nor his money there, but gave Tom fair play, and we got the day.

MARY.

And pray when you got a warrant for your old master Bounce, and carried him before the Justice, because he would not pay you your bargain for the ditching, did not the Justice make him pay you the whole, and for your loss of time going after it, besides all the charges?

JOHN.

Why yes! I don't say but they are fair enough in such things, and will stand up for a poor man; but still I think we are not paid wages enough for our labour.

MARY.

Why, you know John, you have tried different things, but they did not answer; did not you ride for Goose the smuggler, and he paid you half a crown a night, and gave you as much gin as you could drink? but then you came home drunk in the morning, and could not work all day; and you know, you were very near being taken by the Soldiers, if you had not thrown down the tubs, and rode away as fast as you could.

JOHN.

For God's sake don't say any more.

MARY.

I am determined to give it you, now you can't get away; did not you try another scheme? Did not you go out several nights with Platt poaching, and said you could get as much by that in one night, as you could by several days work? And was not you very near being taken with some pheasants upon you, and was not Platt forced to run away for fear of gaol? And did not you keep up several days, 'till we almost wanted, because you thought Cottingham knew you, and was afraid of a warrant being out against you? so that these sort of things don't thrive John.

JOHN.

Well, I wish you would have done, and let us get up; but I still say, I don't think wages are enough this time of year.

MARY.

I must own wages, at a shilling a-day, are very low, but you know you, don't often work by the day; and in taking your work by the peice, either threshing, or moulding, or ditching, you make out much better; and in day work, you have some beer, or money for it; and your master generally gives you a dinner once a week, and he never charges us more than five shillings a bushel for wheat; and you know I and the children got seven bushels in gleaning, and tho' we have six children, three of them went out setting wheat and beans and peas last year, and all was a help; and I and Mary earn what we can by spinning; and thank God we have never yet wanted. You know when you were ill last Christmas was twelve-month, the gentlemen at Bulcamp allowed us six shillings a-week for some time; and did not they allow me three shillings a-week, for a month, in my two last lyings-in? And did not they clothe John at Michaelmas, when we got him out to farmer Steady? And I am sure the Overseers did not use to do such things, when I was a girl, before the House was built.

JOHN.

Well, I own all that is true enough.

MARY.

And don't the Gentlemen and Tradesmen in many places make subscriptions for the poor, and sell them coals, and other things out cheap? And don't they give them a great many things, and money besides? And have not several widows brought up as many children as we have, by their own work, and the assistance of their masters and mistresses, who employ them? Nay, for my own part, I don't think people are the poorer for having many children; for if they are industrious and try to maintain their children, and get them early to work, and keep them tidy, and they themselves keep their church, and behave well, the Gentlemen always look upon them the better, and are more willing to help them---And I declare now, John, I should not mind it, if I was to be with child again, altho' we have so many already; for I am sure we should not be the poorer, if you would but stick to your work, as you used to do when we first married.

JOHN.

Well, faith Mary, you are an honest wench, and talk well; and I will confess none of my new schemes have succeeded, and that I have been always uneasy when I was engaged in them---I will therefore take your advice, and I dare say we shall find, that honesty and industry will meet with their due reward, and procure us friends and assistance, when we want them.